

Expectations of Chinese Immigrant Parents for Their Children's Education: The Interplay of Chinese Tradition and the Canadian Context

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In this study, I used qualitative interviews to explore the expectations of the parents in seven Chinese families who had recently immigrated to Canada. These parents grounded their expectations for their children in Chinese tradition, their deeply rooted cultural heritage. Their personal life experiences and acculturative attitudes also shaped their expectations. The parents' understanding of Canadian society and their perception that visible minorities are disadvantaged prompted them to form a minority ideology and also to advise their children to pursue science-related careers. The expectations of these parents were situationally motivated in different ways to conform to the Canadian socio-cultural context

À l'aide d'interviews qualitatives, l'auteure a étudié les attentes des sept familles chinoises récemment arrivées au Canada. Les attentes de ces parents s'enracinent dans la tradition chinoise. Leurs expériences personnelles et leurs attitudes acculturatives façonnent également leurs attentes. Leur compréhension de la société canadienne et leur sentiment que les minorités visibles sont désavantagées les incitent à former une idéologie de la minorité et à conseiller à leurs enfants de viser une carrière dans les sciences. Les attentes de ces parents sont à divers égards motivées par une volonté de se conformer au contexte socioculturel canadien.

Since coming to Canada from China in January 1997, I have frequently heard from members of the Chinese community that their children are performing exceptionally well in Canadian schools despite of acculturative struggles and English being their second language. These comments prompted me to wonder what helped these students excel in a Canadian socio-cultural milieu, and more specifically, what role their parents played in their school achievement.

Researchers have suggested that, of many family variables that contribute to children's school achievement, parental expectations are the most salient (Hoge, Smit, & Crist, 1997; Patrikakou, 1997; Peng & Wright, 1994; Seiginer, 1983). Because Chinese parents are reputed to have high educational expectations, I examined their parenting and educational

experiences, looking particularly at their expectations for their children.

As the largest visible minority group in Canada, the Chinese population has surpassed one million (Statistics Canada, 2001). However, very few studies have focused on this community, and little is known about recent Chinese immigrant families. To address this gap, I explored the influence of the expectations of recent Chinese immigrant parents on their children's schooling. The purpose was to uncover how Chinese immigrant parents constructed their expectations while living in a dominant culture, and also to depict how they "do things on the basis of their beliefs and desires, striving for goals, meeting obstacles which they best or which best them" (Bruner, 1990, p. 42).

In this article, I focused on three research questions. First, what expectations do Chinese immigrant parents hold for their children? Second, how do their cultural beliefs and life experiences shape these expectations? And third, how do their visible minority experiences influence their educational expectations and career aspirations?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the mid-1960s, two influential American newspapers, *The New York Times* (Petersen, 1966) and *U.S. News and World Report* ("Success Story," 1966), featured articles on the educational and economic attainment of Japanese and Chinese immigrants, praising them as hard-working, uncomplaining role models of diligence and achievement. Since then, Asian Americans have been continually portrayed as a success story and lauded as a model minority (Kao, 1995; Kim & Chun, 1994). Numerous comparative studies have reported that, regardless of social class and family economic background, Asian students have higher SAT scores, higher grade-point averages, more years of schooling completed, and a lower dropout rate than European Americans and other ethnic groups (Kim & Chun, 1994; Sue & Abe, 1995). Many researchers have looked for explanations to account for this remarkable phenomenon (Chun, 1995; Hirschman & Wong, 1986; Kao, 1995; Kim & Chun, 1994; Peng & Wright, 1994; Sue & Okazaki, 1990). Two views have emerged from previous studies: one ascribes this success to Asian cultural values, the other to the demands of acculturation.

The exceptional school performance of Chinese immigrant students, especially in science and technology, has been well documented. Although some researchers have accredited their academic success mainly to their cultural and family support (Chao, 1996; Chen & Uttal, 1988; Schneider &

Lee 1990), others view it as a co-product of Chinese cultural values and visible minority status (Kim & Chun, 1994; Sue & Okazaki, 1990). Chun (1995) argues that their orientation to science and technology is not necessarily a reflection of their personal preferences and interests, but an adaptive response to external, societal constraints of the host country. However, detailed portraits of this phenomenon have remained rare.

Different families in different cultures hold different parental expectations, underlined with different interpretations (Alexander, Entwisle, & Bedinger, 1994; Sue & Okazaki, 1990). Although numerous studies have consistently reported a positive relationship in Asian cultures between high parental expectations and children's school achievement (Hirschman & Wong, 1986; Kao, 1995; Kim & Chun, 1994; Peng & Wright, 1994; Schneider & Lee, 1990), scholars have not been able to reveal through quantitative data how parental expectations work in a particular cultural and family context. Furthermore, previous research on immigrant Chinese families has been mainly carried out in the United States; few such studies have been conducted in Canada.

To understand the expectations of Chinese immigrant parents in Canada, it is essential to contextualize their experiences because their expectations are derived and conditioned by particular social, cultural, historical, and family circumstances. Generally speaking, the process of uprooting is always an uncertain and difficult journey, demanding determination and resilience. Compared to European immigrants, visible minority immigrants have to undergo a more tempestuous acculturative process because they are at risk of many potential stressors, such as racial stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination (Chun, 1995; Suzuki, 1995). Hence, one cannot fully understand the experiences of the Chinese immigrants without examining their immigration history in Canada.

The earliest Chinese arrived on the west coast of Canada in 1858. From the gold rush (1858–1880) to railway construction (1881–1885), from the head tax (1885–1923) to the exclusion era (1923–1947), the Chinese made invaluable contributions to the construction of the new country, yet endured persistent institutional racial discrimination (Li, 1998; Sugiman, 1992). Li (1998) contended that, aside from Aboriginal people, no other ethnic group has suffered such massive torture and destruction of their community in Canada.

In 1967, Canada adopted an immigration policy to admit immigrants on the basis of their educational qualifications and professional preparation. This policy brought new waves of immigration of people with diverse ethnic backgrounds. According to "Immigration Overview: Facts and

Figures" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2001), mainland China has been one of the top three source countries of immigration since 1996 and the number one source country since 1998. Unlike earlier Chinese immigrants, the majority of recent ones are highly educated urban professionals who intend to settle permanently in Canada by providing skilled work. However, many of them have to work as manual labourers for basic survival. After examining the data obtained in Canadian employed labour force from 1971 to 1991, Li (1998) reported that Chinese are under-represented in managerial, scholastic, and administrative positions. Although the Statistics Canada 2001 census has clearly showed that higher education is a gateway to higher income, recent immigrants have substantially less earning power than native-born Canadians, even after 10 years of residence in the country, regardless of their education (Statistics Canada, 2001). Ethnic background remains socially significant in Canada despite its multicultural policy.

The expectations of recent Chinese immigrant parents may depend not only on their cultural and educational background, but also on the attitudes of the host society towards newcomers and visible minority groups. Only by uncovering both their cultural values and acculturative struggles can researchers obtain a deeper understanding of these parents' expectations.

METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm

Researchers always approach a problem from a certain paradigm or world view, a basic set of beliefs or assumptions to guide their inquiries. The underlying philosophy of a study is shaped by the nature of reality, the relationship between the researcher and the researched, and the role of values (Creswell, 1998; Guba, 1990). These premises eventually lead to the selection and employment of research methods.

In this study, I sought to uncover multiple realities constructed by immigrant Chinese families in their given social, cultural, and personal circumstances, viewing the participants as collaborators or valued beings, whose perspectives and world views I attempted to uncover (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). I regarded the research process as a co-constructed activity, shaped by queries and narratives. As a researcher from the same cultural root, my intimate cultural knowledge and personal acculturative experiences have inevitably shaped data interpretation because, as Riessman (1993) has suggested, the construction of any work always bears the mark of the person who creates it.

Research Process

To understand the expectations of Chinese immigrant parents, I used open-ended interviewing as my primary data collection method to help uncover previous silenced voices and bring in rich and contextualized information. I collected the data in the city of Ottawa. The fieldwork lasted five months, from October 1999 to February 2000. Seven recent immigrant Chinese families from mainland China who had resided in Canada for fewer than 15 years, both parents and their adolescent children, participated in the open-ended interviews. This article reports only data obtained from the parent participants.¹

The educational background of the parents largely represented the profile of recent Chinese immigrants, a result of Canada's "brain-drain" immigration policy. Except for one high-school graduate, eight participants had Ph.D. degrees, one a Master's, and four Bachelor's. All seven children interviewed had previously received some primary education in China. They were top students in Canadian schools, four of them enrolled in gifted programs. As a consequence of China's only-child policy, five families had only one child. The other two families had their second child in Canada.

I interviewed the parents in Mandarin, the language of their choice, and then translated the data into English. I began the data analysis as soon as I completed the first interview. My engagement with the data allowed me to make sense of the intentions and experiences of my participants, to identify emerging common themes and unique cases, and further, to craft a representation of their perspectives and stories.

FINDINGS

From the interviews with the parents, I developed five common themes: cultural expectations, life experiences, acculturative attitudes, career aspirations, and minority ideology. In presenting these themes, I have provided thick descriptions of their narratives (Geertz, 1973) to give voice to these immigrant Chinese parents.

Cultural Expectations

The parents unanimously emphasized that their children must obtain a quality university education. They regarded education as their top priority and viewed academic achievement as one of hallmarks of Chinese civilization. Mr. Chen,² for example, was proud that Chinese people historically had a high respect for formal education.

Our five thousand years of Confucian heritage have formed a firm belief that nothing is more important than formal education [*wei you du shu gao*].³ This influence is fundamental to both the Chinese at home and abroad. Confucianism regards education as the most important thing in one's life. Probably this is why Chinese parents are willing to invest money and energy in their children's education. (Mr. Chen)

Likewise, Mr. Lin viewed the Confucian heritage as the source of high parental expectations.

Our Chinese history, five thousand years of feudal society, has produced unique cultural beliefs, such as academic achievement leads to higher social status [*xue er you ze shi*]. So in China, all parents want their children to achieve privileged positions through academic excellence [*wang zi cheng luong*]. The meaning of this Confucian motto is that only if you excel in your studies will you have a good future. (Mr. Lin)

The parents pointed out that children who grow up in Chinese culture are generally motivated to pursue excellence. Mr. Hua used a Confucian concept, filial piety (*xiao*), to account for this attitude.

Chinese children desire to honour their families and ancestors. If they fail, they would lose face in front of their families. . . . Chinese children want to succeed, to feel good, and to bring honour to their families. Whereas Western kids rarely have this kind of thinking. . . . The ultimate goal of Chinese children is to strive for a good position in society. They want people who know them, such as their parents, teachers, and friends, to be proud of them. . . . Chinese children have a sense of shame. This is their strength. (Mr. Hua)

All seven families resoundingly attributed their children's school achievement to the education their children received in their home country because high cultural expectations and the challenging learning environment in China kept them academically motivated. For example, Mr. Hua felt that, because his daughter was born and raised in Canada, she was more fun-loving, not as serious about schoolwork as her older brother. Mr. Hua discussed ideological differences between the two cultures and stressed that the school achievement of the Chinese students owed much to their cultural and personal characteristics.

Chinese beliefs are just the opposite of the Western ideology. Western people are interested in enjoying the present. They say that life is short, so play hard. See, our cultural background and life philosophy are entirely different. People say that the Chinese are intelligent. . . . I disagree. The Chinese success is not the result of intelligence but the result of diligence, self-discipline, and self-regulation. You know, they have standards and they strive for their goals. (Mr. Hua)

Life Experiences

The expectations of these parents were largely derived from their life experiences. It was clear that their past encounters, especially their childhood experiences with their own parents, had significantly influenced the expectations they held for their children.

With intimate knowledge about the importance of education, these highly educated parents wanted their children to obtain a quality education and to reap the benefits. Mrs. Hua, who had only a secondary education in China, held high educational expectations because of the discriminatory attitudes she had experienced in Chinese society.

You know what happened in my generation. I was sent to the country to be re-educated during the Cultural Revolution, so I did not learn too much knowledge. I felt that I was discriminated against in Chinese society because I was not well educated. That's why I expect my children to get a university education, to live a better life. I want them to get good grades in school. I was not educated and was not very capable. I always tell them that they should not be like their mom. They should strive to achieve the best they can to ensure a good future. I repeat and repeat the same thing every day. (Mrs. Hua)

Mrs. Lin reflected that the high expectations the parents experienced in their childhood not only contributed to their own success, but also flowed to the next generation, leading them to set high expectations for their only child.

The source of our expectations is deeply embedded in our family roots and our life experiences. We grew up with high parental expectations. Our own parents were very demanding when we were children. . . . To describe it with the word we frequently use today, I would say that their expectations were a pressure, but this pressure was effective and useful. Maybe the word "pressure" is not good anymore, but at that time it was positive for us. This pressure is what we Chinese refer as the driving force [*dong li*]. Therefore, our expectations for our son are the same as our parents held for us. Looking back at the journey we went through, from China to Canada, I should say that we did very well in the past. What we have achieved in our life could not have been done without our parents' expectations. . . . Because my husband has surpassed the expectations of his own parents, naturally he holds high expectations for his son. (Mrs. Lin)

In contrast, Mr. Fang grew up in China without high parental expectations. Everything he had achieved in life went beyond the imagination of his parents and surpassed his own self-expectations. Mr. Fang learned from his life experiences that it was impossible to plan a future; therefore, he preferred not to hold specific expectations for his daughter.

We cannot predict what she will do in the future. For my parents, they could not tell what I would be doing today. Myself, when I was a kid, I never knew what I would be doing now. . . . I never thought that one day I would come to Canada. When I came to Canada, I never thought that I would work for Nortel. Therefore, I believe what will happen in the future is not the same as you wished. See, I even cannot foresee the future for myself, how can I expect something for the next generation? . . . Because I have this kind of experience, I hold a similar attitude for my daughter's future. (Mr. Fang)

Instead of being specific, the Fang family held general expectations. While maintaining a basic requirement for a university education, they stressed that the most important thing was to help their daughter improve current performances to "build a solid ground" so that she would become a well-educated, independent, and responsible adult.

Acculturative Attitudes

With an awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of Chinese and Canadian culture, the parents held varying acculturative attitudes. Favouring a cultural integration, Mr. Chen pointed out that Eastern and Western cultures could learn from each other to create an ideal education.

In Chinese culture, we stress that a certain amount of pressure is necessary for children's success, while Western people value children's natural development. In fact, I think both cultural and educational systems have their own problems. That's why there is a tendency to combine two cultures. For example, in China, the government is trying to reduce student homework; in Canada, there is a trend to increase student workload. Hopefully, it is going towards the right direction. The weakness of Eastern education is that students do not get hands-on experiences because it focuses on classroom teaching and exam writing. While Western culture emphasizes how to express oneself. I think it has something to do with history. In Chinese history, you do not need to say things but you have to show what you have done. In Western culture, people evaluate you by what you said more than by what you did. That's why they try as hard as they can to express themselves. (Mr. Chen)

In terms of education and parenting, the majority of the parents maintained Chinese standards. Mrs. Lin stressed that the demanding nature of Chinese parenting could ultimately produce positive outcomes.

One of the advantages in Chinese culture is that parents are very demanding. We believe that accomplishment is a result of tough discipline and hard work. We always tell our son, if he did not study hard, he would not have become a top student. Our demands, including the extra homework we assigned to him, are crucial for his school success. If we parent him like Western people, let him develop naturally, we won't get ideal results. (Mrs. Lin)

Mrs. Chen expressed a favourable attitude towards Chinese education:

"You know why could Chinese students excel in Canadian schools? It must have something to do with Eastern education. Chinese culture and education is good for children, and we are used to it, so we should parent our child in a Chinese way." She pointed out that some Canadian parents adopt "a let-things-drift attitude" (*fang ren zi liou*), and do not provide enough guidance for their children. She was particularly dissatisfied with weaker intellectual challenges in Canadian schools.

For me, I think that elementary and secondary school education in China is better than that of Canada. You know, children go to school to learn something, but sometimes the school system in Canada does not provide sufficient services. . . . As a teenage boy, he is curious and eager to learn many things, but the school system here cannot provide what he wants. (Mrs. Chen)

In contrast, Mrs. Fang was concerned about the Chinese academic inclination because it failed to nurture children's multiple intelligences and mental health. "In China, some schools label students by their grades. It has a great impact on those students who do not do well in school. It may damage their confidence for life long." The Qin family pointed out that the strict academic training in China did help children develop good study habits; however, it directed them only towards an academic journey, regardless of their own interests, talents, and abilities. With an appreciation of the inclusive and open education in North America, Mrs. Qin told an art exhibition story to illustrate this openness.

My daughter is not good at painting. From kindergarten to elementary school in China, whenever the school exhibited student artwork, my daughter's painting would not be chosen. We went to see the exhibition, always only two or three students' paintings were presented on the wall because those were evaluated as excellent products. The work of other students was not chosen. For our daughter, her painting would not be selected even if half of the paintings of her class were presented. She was weak at it. Usually she painted poorly. Her painting was never chosen for presentation. After we arrived in the States, she invited us to the school lobby in the first week. To our surprise, one of her paintings was presented on the wall! It was not because she painted better after coming to the States, but because all the paintings were exhibited [laughs]. In this way, my daughter became very proud of herself. Everything she did, she could show it to other people. She did not feel embarrassed about her poor painting. She felt that her work was appreciated by others. . . . Uh, I think it's bad that in China they only showed good ones. (Mrs. Qin)

Career Aspirations

The parents held specific career aspirations for their children. They pointed out that minority immigrants must align their career aspirations to the

demands of the Canadian labour market and their visible minority status. To avoid competing with mainstream society, all seven families encouraged their children to excel in science subjects so as to take up professions in engineering and other technical fields. They generally discouraged their children from pursuing careers in arts, politics, or law.

Mrs. Yu learned important lessons from her own job-searching experiences in Canada: "As a minority member, your choice of specialization is crucial for your future employment." In her mind, a good career meant a well-paid, high-tech job. Considering possible financial strain, she firmly objected to her daughter pursuing a career in the arts. She also discouraged her from studying law because of anticipated racial discrimination.

I do not support my daughter to become a lawyer. In Canada, although multiculturalism is written into the government policy, you can feel racial discrimination everyday, everywhere. It's very common. Minority groups, especially visible minority groups are in a very disadvantaged situation.... I advise my daughter not to choose lawyer as a career because a lawyer represents justice, but how can you argue with the dominant society if they believe that the "truth" is on the side of the white majority, not on the side of visible minority? It will be very difficult for my daughter to pursue such a career. If she wants to become a doctor or a computer expert, that will be easier. (Mrs. Yu)

Mr. Hua stood firm that he had a significant influence on his son's interest in science and his career choice in computer engineering. He mentioned that his son aspired to become a medical doctor in his junior-high years, but Mr. Hua discouraged this ambition because he was concerned that pursuing a medical profession would be too long and unstable. He believed that his daily directives had instilled in his children a strong awareness of their minority disadvantages. He illustrated intangible racial preference in the Canadian job market.

As a minority group, we are in a disadvantaged situation. I often tell them that if all candidates are on the same level, for sure the employer will choose blue-eyes first. The opportunity won't be given to them. To deal with this, they should be better, no, much better than the whites, then the employer may consider choosing them instead of blue eyes. My children knew this since they were very young. (Mr. Hua)

Mrs. Qin, a pediatrician in China, was not able to practise her career in Canada, even though her daughter dreamed of becoming a medical doctor. The parents had worries because they knew that she would have to commit to lengthy training and study, and also to compete with the mainstream. However, they did not thwart her career ambition; instead, they considered alternative options in case she failed in her pursuit. Mrs. Qin explained:

She can start from medical science. If she fails, she can always switch to a relevant field, such as biology or pharmacology. If all of these fail, she can go to study engineering even around the age of thirty.

Minority Ideology

Confronting an unexpected new reality that was far from their original rosy dreams, these families had to make a painful adjustment in Canada. The disadvantaged status of new minority immigrants deeply disturbed Mr. Wang.

I have lived in Canada for several years now. I feel that, as first generation immigrants, we have a big tragedy. We are highly intelligent with excellent professional and technical skills as well as good manual abilities. However, due to our cultural background and language barriers, we are placed in a very disadvantaged situation. We can only show our strength in high-tech fields. It's very sad that most Chinese immigrants have to work in high-tech companies. Given our intelligence and ability, we can run or manage a company instead of only working as technicians. (Mr. Wang)

To cope with minority disadvantages, the parents resoundingly asserted that their children needed to be better and stronger than the white majority. Mrs. Wang constantly reminded her son of the potential racial discrimination he would encounter in Canadian society. She stressed that he must be fully prepared for this reality.

I told him that he should prepare himself and know how to deal with discrimination. . . . In mainstream society, sometimes even though he is excellent, the good position may not be offered to him. He should remember that there always exists racial discrimination. If he wants to get respected, he should do a remarkable job so other people won't put him down. . . . The first important thing is that he should be strong and good enough to earn the respect of others. One of our expectations is that wherever he goes, he should always remember that he is Chinese and is not inferior to anybody. He should be physically, psychologically, and intellectually strong enough so nobody can bully him and put him down. There exists racial discrimination here and there, now and then, he should prepare himself and know how to deal with it. (Mrs. Wang)

According to the Chen family, their expectations were essentially shaped by their visible minority status. Mr. Chen maintained that, to create a chance for success, minority members must do better than the white majority.

As a visible minority in Canada, only if we do our best can we compete with mainstream people. I mean we can never stand at the same level with those Western people. Only if we are better than them can we be treated as the same class and at the same level. So as

a minority student, my son should not act like those white students, playing and enjoying every day. They can do whatever they want in the future but he does not have the same privilege as they do. If he does things like the whites, in the future, even though he achieves at the same level, he won't get the same benefit as they do because there are some other factors involved. That's why he needs to compensate this disadvantage with other means. The easiest way is through education. If his educational level is higher than them, for sure he will be able to compete with them. It is this consciousness that motivates Chinese parents to hold high educational expectations. (Mr. Chen)

Mr. Hua equated the status of visible minority immigrants to that of women's situation in Canadian society. He pointed out that the awareness of minority disadvantage drove immigrant Chinese students to work harder.

The Chinese immigrants seldom get into a director's position, no matter how excellent they are. They call it a glass ceiling. It is almost like women's situation. Women have much less chance to get promoted. . . . As immigrants, Chinese children know that they should hold higher standards for themselves and do better than white Canadians. You ask immigrant Chinese students if they behave like the whites, can they get the same benefits as they do? Nobody will answer yes. They know there is a race issue here. They know that they must be better than the whites, no, should be much better than them in order to get priority to be selected. All Chinese students know this fact. . . . My directives play an important role in my son's academic success. He knows that as immigrants, we need to be better than the whites to be treated the same way. (Mr. Hua)

Mrs. Lin also asserted that their son must understand that, as a minority member, it is both important and necessary to surpass others.

We are visible minorities, and we look different from the majority. We want our son to do better than others so as to earn their respect. Otherwise, nobody will respect and value us. We need to show our abilities so other people will look up to us. As a minority group in a foreign land, we do not have advantages as those native-born Canadians have. For example, the same position, maybe a white person can get it with 8, but we need to get it with 10. Therefore, we must devote ourselves to do better. We always talk with him about this issue, seriously. . . . He understands us and knows that he must try harder than others. (Mrs. Lin)

DISCUSSION

The convergence and divergence of the accounts of the participants have touched many aspects of their lives in China and Canada. Their expectations reflected their deeply ingrained cultural values, their desire for a better life, their striving for excellence, and their struggle to adjust to their visible minority status. As new immigrants, they had to live daily

amid the clash of two cultures, which presented new challenges to what they had cherished. Tension, or a coexistence of contradictory views and feelings, permeates the narratives of the parents, such as determination and hesitation, expectations and apprehensions, and dreams and worries. In accordance with the arguments of Kim and Chun (1994) and Sue and Okazuki (1990), the findings of this study suggest that indigenous Chinese cultural values and acculturative struggles have co-contributed to the expectations of these Chinese immigrant parents for the educational achievements of their children.

The parents all saw high educational expectations as a cultural phenomenon and the essence of Confucian philosophy. With this cultural pride, they frequently referred to classical Confucian tenets to justify their parenting beliefs and practice. Consistent with previous research literature (Chao, 1996; Chen & Uttal, 1988; Schneider & Lee 1990), this study has affirmed the power of Chinese cultural expectations. High Chinese parental expectations and children's striving for excellence are not only individually and psychologically driven, but largely a collective function of their family, community, and society at large.

Chinese cultural expectations hold both the authority of tradition and hope for the future. In a context where everyone respects education, Chinese parents regard achievement as a family honour, and view success as a source of happiness. As Mrs. Hua experienced, people in Chinese society are judged by their educational backgrounds. High achievers are valued for their excellence, and poor performers are discriminated against for their incapacity. Although Chinese cultural expectations exert pressure on children, Mr. Chen and Mrs. Lin insisted that this pressure is necessary and positive because it produces desired outcomes. This cultural pressure has served as the driving force behind high parental expectations, passionate parental support, and demanding parenting practices. Except for the Qin and Fang families, who were relatively open to alternative options, the other five families seemed to more or less push their children towards their expected path.

Mr. Hua attributed the shared parent-child expectations in Chinese culture to *xiao*, a Confucian construct that Chinese people have practised for centuries. *Xiao* requires that children should unconditionally bring reward and honour to their parents. In this cultural climate, Chinese children generally study with a sense of duty, a sense of shame, and a desire for parental approval. The power of parental expectations in Chinese culture cannot be understood without taking their tradition and history into consideration because a certain parent-child consensus needs no justification in that context, and, too often, this tacit agreement appears

incomprehensible to outsiders.

Parental expectations were also derived from and shaped by personal life experience, as featured in the stories told by the Lin and Fang families. Because of the high expectations they experienced in their own childhood, and the benefit and prestige they enjoyed in their adult life, the Lin family maintained high standards for their son's school performance. The Fang family, in contrast, insisted that they should not plan a future for their daughter because their own achievement had little to do with their own parents' expectations. Despite the pressure of cultural expectation, different life experiences can lead to different parenting philosophies and beliefs, and ultimately to different parenting practices. Because the parents tend to parent their children the way they were parented, the formation of Chinese parental expectations can be understood only in respect to its complexity and dynamics.

Parental expectations were significantly shaped by their immigration experiences and acculturative attitudes. While concurrently transiting two cultures that are distinctively different from each other in multiple ways, different families held different acculturative attitudes based on their views of Chinese and Western culture. In general, the parents took pride in their Chinese heritage, especially the value it places on education, but disliked the constraints of its academic inclination. They appreciated Western openness, yet were concerned about its limitless freedom and weak intellectual challenge. Although these new Chinese immigrants were making an effort to adjust to the challenge of acculturation, they retained a strong Chinese identity. For instance, Mrs. Chen espoused Chinese education and insisted that she should parent her son in a Chinese way. Mrs. Qin favoured Western openness; however, her mind was essentially conditioned by conventional Chinese thinking because she believed that her daughter's artwork was poor. In reality, she perceived her daughter's artwork as poor not because her daughter painted poorly, but because Chinese culture imposed an adult-centred standard on children's work.

Based on their minority experiences and perceived racism in Canada, the parents held specific career aspirations; that is, their children should specialize in science and technological fields. Their accounts lend support to Chun's (1995) argument that the limited occupational aspirations of Asian immigrants are not necessarily motivated by their personal interests and preferences but by their disadvantaged, visible minority status. Mrs. Yu's objection to her daughter studying law, and Mr. Hua's "blue eye" priority, have well illustrated their awareness of this race-based inequality in Canadian society in general, and the Canadian labour market in particular. The stories told by these families affirmed Li's (1998) assertion

that race is still of significance in the Canadian employment sector. As he reported, in certain occupations such as management, academia, and administration, the Chinese are under-represented. The lack of role models in these fields has greatly limited the career aspirations of these new Chinese immigrant parents and will continue to condition their participation in the social, cultural, and economic life of Canada.

To date, Canada has made much progress towards an open, inclusive society; however, as the narratives of these parents have revealed, it is naïve to assume that once the Constitution outlawed racism, it would disappear from everyday life. New forms of racism are expressed and implemented in subtle and covert ways. They might appear to be invisible in Canadian society, but are evident to minority groups. Given inveterate racial prejudice and discrimination in Canadian history, and the denial of racism in the present day, to achieve true multiculturalism is by no means an easy task. The worries and fears the parents expressed send a clear message that ethnicity is a factor they have to consider when making career choices and life decisions for their children. Their unique minority ideology is a product of perceived institutional racism, a pattern emerged from social practice and exercise of power.

Although realizing that not everybody is an equal participant in Canadian society, the parents viewed education as a weapon against racism, and regarded a science-related career as a means of obtaining upward mobility. They encouraged their children to be better prepared, and guided their children towards certain paths to earn respect, to maximize the chance of success, and to minimize damaging outcomes. Perceived life disadvantages associated with their visible minority status have not only reformulated their identity, produced a minority mentality, but also reshaped their educational expectations and career aspirations.

Given their educational and professional qualifications, it is not surprising that these immigrant parents wanted their children to secure a good life through education. As previous research has suggested (Alexander, Entwisle, & Bedinger, 1994), social class can be a factor that leads to high parental expectations in these Chinese immigrant families. Future studies need to recruit participants from various educational and occupational backgrounds to obtain a fuller picture of the immigrant Chinese experience.

CONCLUSION

From this study, I have come to better understand the Chinese perspective on success in Canada. Obviously, the expectations of these Chinese parents

played a significant role in their children's school achievement. Notwithstanding their different acculturative attitudes, the parents generally attributed their expectations to Chinese cultural values and their visible minority status in Canada. Although the high educational expectations of these parents were rooted in their cultural beliefs and shaped by their life experiences, their career aspirations and minority ideology were directly related to the disparity between their dreams of success and the constraint of minority disadvantages in Canadian society.

No culture is static. In accordance with research literature, this study has demonstrated that the expectations of these Chinese immigrant parents are significantly shaped by the dynamic and complex interplay of indigenous Chinese cultural expectations and the challenges of acculturation. In other words, high parental expectations are rooted in Chinese cultural heritage and are situationally motivated and historically transformed in different ways in response to the demands of the Canadian socio-cultural context.

Too often, people tend to "mistake their own experiences for the experiences of others" (Denzin, 2001, p. 3). A mainstream understanding, therefore, can be a far cry from minority experiences. By giving voice to this fast-growing and largest visible minority group in Canada, I have addressed the gap for this under-researched population. Because any phenomenon can only be contextually meaningful, more research initiatives on visible minority groups are needed to raise their voices, to help the mainstream learn about them and from them. Given the changing racial and cultural composition in Canadian society, policy makers, researchers, and educators need to make a concerted and sustained effort to ensure that our educational system serves as an important vehicle to provide equal opportunities for students of all backgrounds, to help them contribute to, and benefit from, a plural, open, and progressive society.

NOTES

- 1 For a complete report of the study, see Li (2002).
- 2 I have assigned pseudonyms to all participants to ensure their anonymity.
- 3 The classical Chinese phrases the parents used are in brackets.

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